



Universal Acceptance Day Uruguay - May 26 , 2025

UNESCO – Recommendation 2003

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Good morning, everyone. First of all, I want to greet you and bring you greetings from the UNESCO Regional Office in Montevideo. UNESCO has been in this country for more than 75 years. I want to congratulate ICANN and ISOC for the initiative, for the excellent turnout, which I am pleased to confirm, and once again congratulate them for putting Uruguay on the map of this global celebration.

I'm going to steal a few of your minutes. I'll be brief, really, because the only mission I have here today—you are the experts—is to renew UNESCO's commitment to this cause. UNESCO and ICANN are partners; we are colleagues in this. In other words, we want to reinforce the idea that you are not alone in this battle. As the panelist who spoke before me rightly said, all of this is a construction

that takes time and requires the positive input of all the people working in this country. Thank you.

On these matters. I want to outline this in a theoretical context, without boring you, but to give you a sense of what's happening in the world and how UNESCO sees what's happening in the world for a long time now. And when I say a long time, I'm not exaggerating, because UNESCO 's recommendation on the promotion and use of multilingualism and universal access to cyberspace—a long name for a recommendation—that's why I need this memoir, from 2023, 2003, sorry, that is, a little over 20 years ago.

That 2003 recommendation begins by evoking Article 1 of the UNESCO Constitution , which turns 80 this year. This serves as a useful reminder of how old some problems are and how we are giving new names to long-standing dilemmas. Eighty years ago, in Article 1, UNESCO recommended that all its member states, including Uruguay, of course, accede to all international agreements that contribute to facilitating the free circulation of thought through ideas and images. We were talking about this 80 years ago.

The 2003 recommendation immediately states that new information and communication technologies, although they seem uncontroversial today, offer an improvement and increase in this free circulation of ideas, words, and images. But at the same time, and as they also seem uncontroversial today, they pose the enormous challenge of guaranteeing access to this fabulous universal banquet for as many people as possible. And this happens over the years and remains very difficult.

This participation in this fabulous banquet of the free circulation of ideas is compromised by difficulties and discriminations of a socioeconomic, geographic, cultural, and digital literacy nature, which is surely one of the aspects that most interests you. Having said that, which frames the issue in its long-standing origins, the 2003 recommendation moves forward with some concrete suggestions, with some specific chapters that give the recommendation its name.

The first is to develop multilingual content and systems that even include access to indigenous languages. According to very recent data from 2023, at least 15% of the world's population is excluded from this exchange of ideas online due to language barriers. Because of language barriers alone, 15% of the world's population is excluded from this banquet.

In March of this year, just now, the President of the UN, the President of the UN, the President of the UN, in March 2025, when UNESCO and ICANN renewed an agreement in Paris, UNESCO Director-General Audrey Azoulay recalled another figure worth reviewing today. Barely 400 of the nearly 7,000 languages spoken in the world are completely freely accessible on the internet. Barely 400 of nearly 7,000.

The second chapter of this recommendation speaks of facilitating access to social networks and services. Another thing that is easily said but much more difficult to implement. Universal access to the internet, according to the UNESCO recommendation, is a way to promote the exercise of human rights, as understood in the famous UN Declaration of Human Rights, which we all quote and don't always fully respect.

Universal internet access also guarantees greater and better practice of life for citizens. A greater and better exercise of citizenship. But whose citizenship do we need to ask ourselves about? Is it also that of developed countries? Is it also that of rural areas? Is it also that of so many people who, despite being citizens, are excluded from that access?

After the declarations of principles, there's a practical aspect to all these problems. We must never forget the economic aspect of these matters. It's pointless to guarantee free access to all of this if the fees are not affordable. Member States must make a commitment to guarantee affordable fees, primarily for educational communities, public service institutions, and the most disadvantaged communities, for example, those where people with disabilities work or study.

There's another practical, material importance, not just related to a declaration of principles: bringing local advisors and experts in information and knowledge technology closer to these communities and ensuring their access. People like us, who regularly participate in very privileged environments like this one, in matters where technology is at stake, experience the difficulties this entails day in and day out. Imagine the difficulties a teacher in a rural school with full access might face, to use a Uruguayan example. So that all this becomes a real practice.

The third and final chapter of this recommendation is to develop public domain content that, while respecting fundamental issues such as the privacy of individuals, which is so critically contested today, and copyright, which must also be respected, guarantees free access to public administration archives. This is also something

that is clearly written on paper and is sometimes not fulfilled. We have the right to freely access public domain archives of public administrations.

And here comes the economic issue again. Not all public offices in all countries, in all member states, have the capacity, for example, to digitize their archives and make them available online. UNESCO does extraordinary work in this regard with its other program, the Memory of the World program. When you have time and want to see it, take a look. It contributes in various ways to enabling member states to keep their public archives in good condition, digitize them, and make them available to the public.

It's also important that all these goals not suffer from geographical, economic, social, or cultural discrimination. And finally, it's important to understand that e-literacy is not the human capital of the information society. And when we mention these issues, I always draw a parallel with what's happening today with artificial intelligence.

Technical expertise cannot be divorced from training in ethical principles. Today, many people are dazzled by the instrumental use of artificial intelligence. And we all rush to see which chat works best, which one we can ask the best questions and provide the best answers to. But if we forget the critical exercise of that use, if we forget ethical training, the ethical aspects that the use of, for example, artificial intelligence considers, we are neglecting a very important problem.

I'll conclude by quoting what UNESCO 's Deputy Director-General for Communication and Information, the organization's leading authority on these issues, Tawfik Jelassi , said. This is very useful for giving a concept to what we're trying to define: the instrumental use of artificial intelligence. And finally, I'll give you an example of an aspect that isn't just a technical problem, but also an ethical one.

Universal acceptance, says UNESCO, is the cornerstone of a truly global and inclusive internet. Adopting universal acceptance is not just a technical necessity, but a firm commitment to affirming cultural inclusion in the digital space. That's what we at UNESCO are working on, with this recommendation dating back to 2003, and we are partners with ICANN and the Uruguayan chapter, so we are in this battle together. Thank you.

